FOCUS on South Plains Agriculture

Texas AgriLife Research and Extension Center at Lubbock
1102 E. FM 1294, Lubbock, Texas 79403

Wheat Agronomy

Winter Wheat Condition in the South Plains

As you well know, without significant precipitation over most of the region since at least October 21, 2010, most of the wheat has been highly stressed. Many dryland stands have barely survived and currently show little potential if rains started today. About one-third to one-half of plants in a dryland variety trial at Lubbock, dry drilled in late September and emerging after the Oct. 21 rains, have died. A dryland field with as little as 7 or 8 surviving plants per square foot still has the potential to return a modest yield if moisture were to come.

Irrigated fields are a different story. Some fields in spite of receiving modest irrigation still don't look that good, but as long as the stand is good and plant health is OK there is still significant yield potential in these fields provided that N is available to the crop and at least modest irrigation is maintained once rapid growth starts

Winter injury to wheat

The cold conditions across the South Plains—even in the higher elevations of Castro, Bailey, Parmer, and northern Lamb Counties—do not appear to have caused significant injury to wheat. I have received no reports of winterkill, though north of Amarillo there are some fields that were damaged. What we see in the South Plains is mostly cosmetic burn back of leaves, but the integrity of the plants seems intact. Potential for winter injury is higher on plants that were moisture stressed (dryland).

Current Topics for Wheat in Top-Dressing N and Weed Control

These topics were reviewed in an earlier edition of FOCUS. Several fields south and southwest of Lubbock appear to be jointing now and a few hollow stems were observed as of Feb. 22. The dry conditions we've had this winter can drive maturity faster if plants are stressed as they seek to try to complete their growth cycle. Any field that is now jointing or just starting ideally would already have late-winter topdress N applied.

The key point is that for an individual stem once the joint is visible the spikelet number and seeds per spikelet for that stem is already set. It cannot be increased with later irrigation or N. This is different from stating that subsequent N and irrigation don't affect yield—they do, but the maximum potential seed number is set, later N and water will not change it.

Are You Considering Terminating Wheat to Increase Acreage for High-Priced Cotton?

With thin stands of wheat in the region and/or irrigated wheat that visually don't look promising, some producers are considering tearing up the wheat to open more land for cotton production. I advise caution, however, before jumping to conclusions that this is a good decision let alone an automatic one.

Here are some preliminary considerations:

- Do I have uniform wheat stands across the field and does it appear that individual plants have several tillers?
- Do my plants look healthy near the crown? And are the effects of the recent cold limited to mostly cosmetic appearance (e.g., leaves burned back due to cold)?
- How much money have I put into the wheat crop? Some producers indicate it may be near $100/A for irrigated wheat. In this case do I want to put this burden on the back of a potential 2011 cotton crop to make the difference up?
- What price appears to be available to me for the 2011 harvest? Wheat in the region is priced off of the Kansas City Board of Trade (KCBOT), and as of Feb. 23 July11 is ~$8.85/bu with regional pricing in the range of $0.80/bu reduced basis. Have I ever sold wheat for $8/bu?
- Is it important that I maintain my rotation, and will I need the stubble from 2011 harvested wheat for my 2012 seedling cotton?

Once these considerations are addressed if a producer decides to terminate the wheat and plant cotton, then here are some further considerations:

- Should I allow the wheat to achieve a certain height then terminate and use as a standard small grains cover?
- Or should I consider haying the wheat? This approach has significant merit for some producers in 2011—
  1. Good quality hay is in short supply due to the lack of grazing
  2. Even if producers have bearded wheat, a hay crop is an option because the crop could be hayed in late boot stage so that the beards are not an issue. This hay crop would have less tonnage per acre, but would be of very high quality with protein content likely in the 16-18% range. It should sell for a good price.
  3. I estimate that haying wheat forage off at late boot stage would probably occur about April 20th or so in the South Plains. This is ample time to prepare for planting cotton. Although the field will lose its vertical wind protection for seedling cotton if hayed, the ground will remain rough due to the presence of the wheat crowns.

- Producers, perhaps eager to plant more cotton, could find a nice compromise by retaining at least half of their wheat for grain (half circles) and spread their water use out with 60 acres of wheat for grain (and 2012 stubble), and then 60 acres of well-irrigated cotton for 2011.

United Sorghum Checkoff Program Farmer Retention Vote is Occurring Now through Monday, Feb. 28th

USCP was initiated in 2008 for promotion, education, and research on grain sorghum. This funding program is based on 0.6% of the grain value (as well as 0.35% of forage value for forage sorghum). Based on the original implementation of the program farmers may vote during the month of February at your local FSA office in the county where you conduct farming operations. You must have grown sorghum between July 1, 2008 and Dec. 31, 2010.

In order to vote, the simplest means to learn how is to visit http://www.sorghumcheckoff.com, or call the Lubbock USCP office, (806) 687-8727 for instructions and a sample ballot (which is about the simplest federal document you will ever see!). You will need to provide documentation to FSA (you may have certified grain sorghum there, otherwise delivery or sales receipts) to be eligible to vote.

The Texas AgriLife programs and staff have appreciated the opportunity to work with USCP implanting education programs as well as conducting research on grain sorghum with new funds that otherwise have not been readily available for many years. One of the first accomplishments of USCP was production of pocket grain sorghum production guides (see below) as well as funded research in the Texas High Plains on several topics including testing of new herbicide-tolerant sorghum, hybrid development and testing, N fertility, etc. Texas AgriLife staff that have been able to implement new projects in grain sorghum include extension agronomist Brent Bean, Amarillo, and Calvin Trostle, Lubbock; weed scientist and agronomist Wayne Keeling, Lubbock; and sorghum breeder Gary Peterson, Lubbock.

USCP Grain Sorghum Production Handbooks Available

Texas AgriLife collaborated to prepare three regional sorghum production pocket guides which were edited and published by USCP. These include:

- South Plains & Rolling Plains Sorghum Handbook (initially entitled West Texas Sorghum Handbook)—This guide is targeted for areas north to Parmer-Castro-Swisher-Briscoe counties as well as the Concho Valley region
- High Plains Sorghum Production Handbook—Covers Texas Panhandle from Deaf Smith-Randall-Armstrong-Donley north into southwest Kansas
- Western Forage Production Guide—Discusses forage sorghum silage production for TX/NM High Plains, western OK & KS, and eastern Colorado.

These guides are free to producers. Call USCP, e-mail at info@sorghumcheckoff.com, or visit online to request your copy.

Peanut Production Workshop Plains, TX, February 28, 2011

Farmers can update their peanut knowledge at the 8th annual Texas AgriLife Extension Service peanut production workshop at the Plains Community Building, Avenue G in Plains. The meeting is set for Monday, February 28th. Registration begins at 8:45 AM and concludes by 1:00 PM. Topics will include varieties, plant disease, weed control, agronomics, economics as well as commodity board updates.

Three CEUs will be available. For preregistration to reserve lunch (noon, Friday, Feb. 25th) and further information contact the Yoakum Co. Extension Office, (806) 456-2263; Scott Russell, Yoakum-Terry IPM Extension agent, (806) 637-4060, or Calvin Trostle, Extension agronomist, (806) 746-6101, ctrostle@ag.tamu.edu There is no charge for the program. CT

FOCUS on South Plains Agriculture

Fair use policy

We do not mind if others use the information in FOCUS for their own purposes, but please give the appropriate credit to FOCUS on South Plains Agriculture when you do. Extension personnel that want to reprint parts of this newsletter may do so and should contact us for a word processor version. Images may or may not be copyrighted by the photographer or an institution. They may not be reproduced without permission. Call 806-746-6101 to determine the copyright status of images.

Editors

David Kerns and Patrick Porter, Co-editors

SEND US A COMMENT BY E-MAIL

Contributing Authors

Calvin Trostle, Extension Agronomist

Useful Web Links

Applied Research Reports (Goldmine)

Texas High Plains ET Network

Irrigation at Lubbock

IPM How-To Videos

Lubbock Center Homepage

Texas Agricultural Experiment Station Home

Texas Cooperative Extension Home

Plains Cotton Growers

County IPM Newsletters

Castro/Lamb

Dawson/Lynn

Crosby/Floyd

Gaines

Hale/Swisher

Hockley/Cochran

Lubbock

Moore

Nolan/Scurry/Mitchell/Jones

Parmer/Bailey

Terry/Yoakum